men with glittering daggers, women wrapped in black shawls, knights and maidens from an oriental fairytale. Then the Father Superior came to the gate. We were welcomed to the monastery. The guests spread on the floor of a large bare room were squeezed together a bit, and we received an armful of fragrant hay as sleeping accommodation.

In the morning the monks gave us tea with black bread and honey. Everything looked different in the daylight, not as mysterious as at night, more cheerful and friendly—the majestic old Byzantine church, the crowded fair in the immense enclosure, the thick forest around and the rugged peaks above. . . .

A stream of men and women, young and old, was moving into the church, entering through the main arch and leaving through a side door. Nobody stopped inside to pray or listen to the service; their purpose was only to leave a gift for the monastery and light a candle before an icon. The mayor explained that this was an old custom faithfully observed by both the Christians and Moslems of the region. Cash donations were few. The faithful were carrying produce—a sack of potatoes, a bundle of carrots, a chunk of cheese, or a quarter of a sheep. We joined the line. A counter was set under the vault of the dark, cool anteroom at the entrance. Two monks were accepting the gifts, sorting them and throwing them over their shoulders onto the heaps behind them—vegetables, cheese, meat.

For most people the festival and the fair were chiefly an occasion for meeting friends, but some business was transacted. Men from the highlands brought sheep, colts, homespun woolen fabrics; a few had brought valuable daggers and silver belts, heirlooms from their forefathers. Those from the lowlands had cows tied to their carts, flour, wine in wineskins, sugar, gunpowder. They did not know much about the rates of exchange between Tsarist rubles and the paper money of the Provisional Government, or between the Transcaucasian and Georgian bonds. To barter a dagger for a cow seemed simpler. Another obvious advantage of barter was that a single transaction could be stretched over a whole day, with some twenty men bargaining on each side.

At noon the space around the monastery walls was cleared of carts and campfires for a contest of horsemen. Mounted youths whirled around with shrill whoops. They looked skillful and spirited to us, but the old-timers were disappointed: the performance was not as good as before the war. Next dancing began, but without a contest of skill—there were too many tribes, each with its own tunes and customs. People preferred to sing and dance among themselves, in small groups.

Before dusk the noise began to subside. The crowd became thinner; people were quietly fading away, to return home by footpaths and